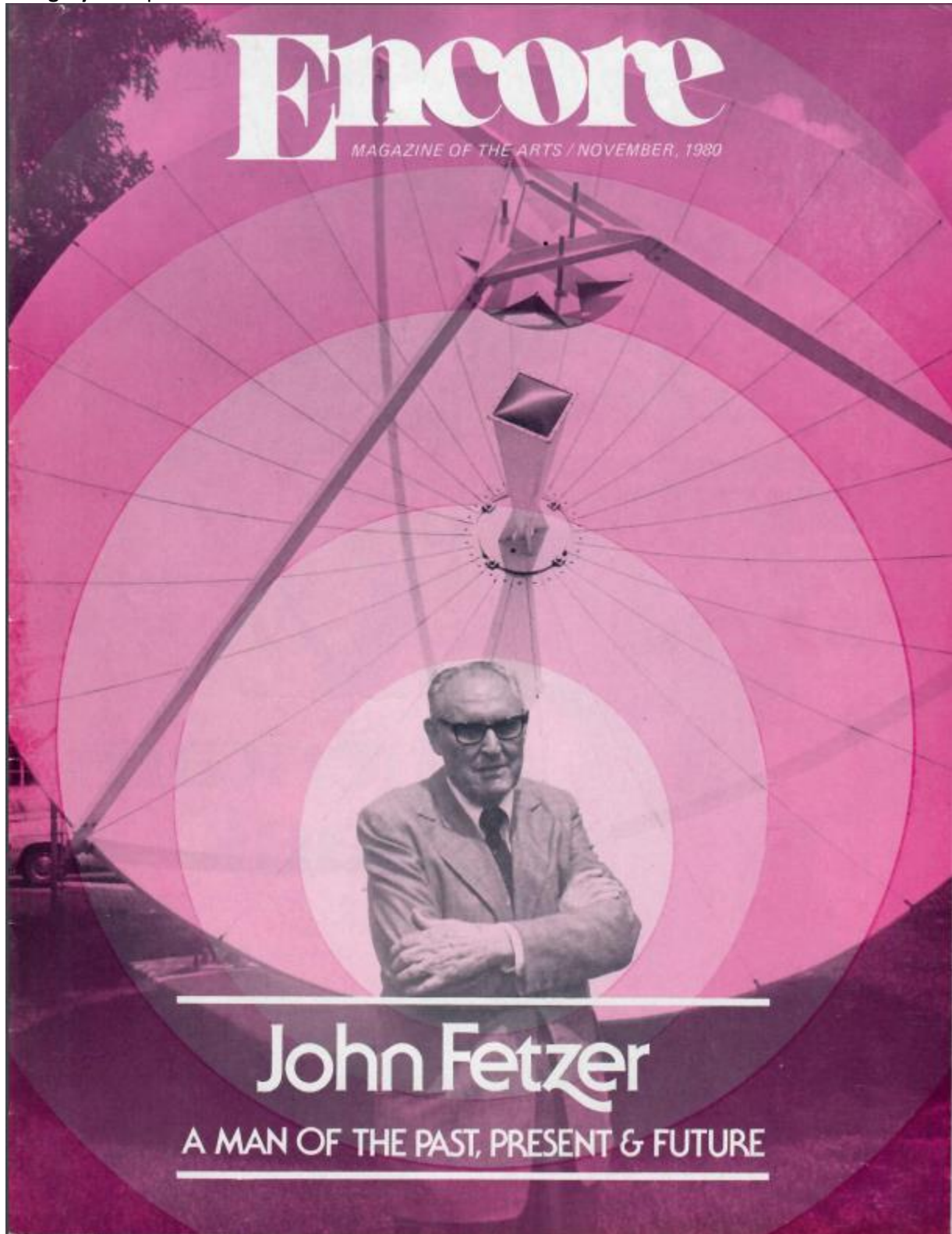


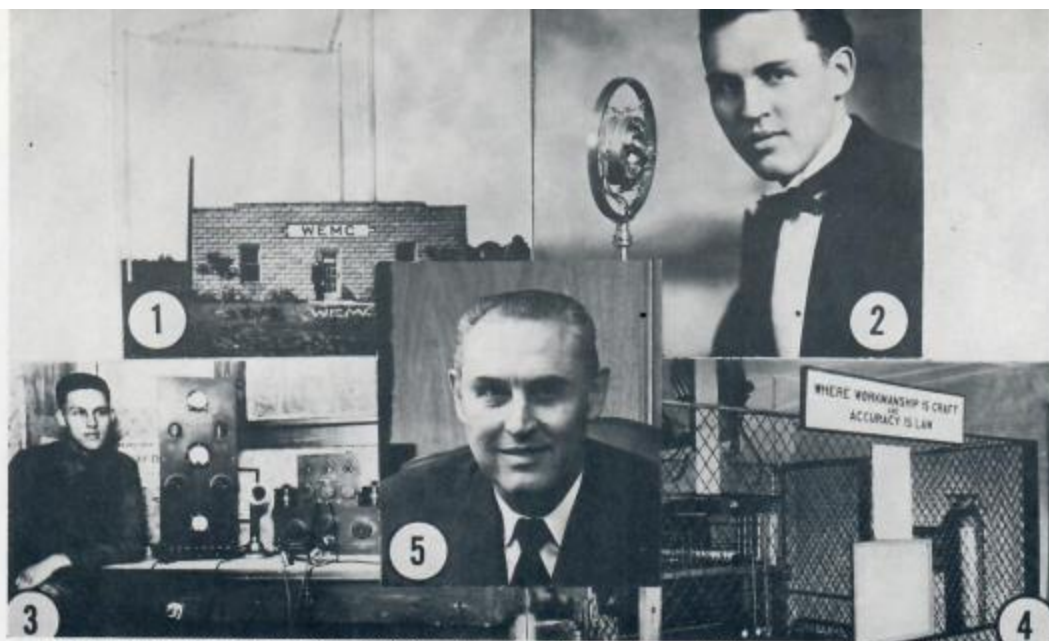
Date: November 1980

Author: Unknown

Category: JEF Speeches and Articles







1. Original transmitter building of WEMC now WKZO, located at Berrien Springs, Michigan; 2. John Fetzer, age 24; 3. Fetzer in his late teens as a ham operator of W8AZ; 4. Old time transmitter; 5. Fetzer, age 60

John Fetzer

A MAN OF THE PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE

Picture this:

It's 1922. There is a crowd gathered around the old Wabash Railroad Depot in Lafayette, Indiana. Bending over the chattering Morse key is Fred Ribble, the dispatcher. The anxious people are collectively holding their breath as Ribble interprets the key's message. He finally goes to the blackboard outside the depot and scrawls: "Final—Tigers 7, Yankees 3."

There was a roar of approval when this scene took place. The heartiest cheer probably came from a tall young man named John Earl Fetzer, whose future as an American radio pioneer and owner of a major league baseball team could appropriately be capsulized in this scenario.

"Ty Cobb was managing the Tigers then," Fetzer recalled. "Everybody in Lafayette was a Tiger fan. The Wabash ran from Detroit to St. Louis and everybody along the tracks loved baseball, although on the south end, nearer to St. Louis, they tended to root for the Cardinals and even a few of them for the old St. Louis Browns."

"But up our way around Lafayette,"

he said, "it was solid Tiger territory. That's how we got the scores, down at the depot. Fred Ribble was my brother-in-law. He taught me Morse code and he introduced me to the wireless radio. The folks would all come down to the depot to get the scores, especially near the end of the season when the pennant races were hot. Fred would get the messages at the end of each inning—how many runs, who got the hits, who scored. Then he'd chalk up the bulletins and we'd wait for the next inning. I never did understand how they got the information from the press box to the Morse operator in Detroit so quickly, but that's how I became fond of the Tigers," said the man who began his stewardship of the Detroit Tigers in 1956 when he organized an 11-man syndicate to buy the team from the estate of W. O. Briggs. Fetzer became sole owner six years later.

But beyond what the Cobb-led Tigers were doing back in the early 1920s, those were important years for Fetzer, who will turn 80 this coming March. Ribble did more than teach him to operate the Morse key.

"He introduced me to many of the

early wonders of radio," said Fetzer, "so much so that it shaped my life in the direction of a professional career in that field."

John Fetzer's own athletic career was fraught with some painful memories, even though he still has his first baseball glove among his mementoes and souvenirs. He started out as a catcher and, "foolishly playing without a mask one day," he took a foul tip on the face which rearranged his nose. That prompted him to shift to first base. He injured both of his knees playing football for West Lafayette High School and by the time he arrived at Purdue University, he had become an armchair quarterback.

Fetzer was born in Decatur, Indiana, in 1901 where his father, a mechanical engineer, ran his own consulting company. The elder Fetzer died when the boy was two and Mrs. Fetzer moved the family to the Lafayette area. He was the youngest of three children.

Those marvelous, mysterious sound transmission gadgets captured Fetzer's attention early on. Ribble had been fascinated by their potential and ceaselessly tinkered with wireless and crystal

Selling Kalamazoo to the World



From the early 1930s to '40s, WKZO radio, as a CBS network affiliate, had to design a campaign to bring the Kalamazoo market area to the attention of national advertisers. Radio advertising coming into Michigan, historically, would flow into the Detroit area with an occasional nod to Flint and Grand Rapids. As a result, a place called Kalamazoo was an unwanted market. One could wear out several pairs of shoes traipsing up and down Madison Avenue to peddle the wares of a small radio station in a town by the name of Kalamazoo, and more often than not the salesman was greeted with snickers.

In order to overcome the unwanted syndrome, the first selling job that was undertaken was to advertise the western Michigan area as "Michigan's other big market." When WKZO assumed its network affiliation, it had to overcome the time-honored concept that each community was a separate market and each community must have its own facilities to the exclusion of all others. The job of John Fetzer and WKZO was to collectively bring the cities of Kalamazoo, Battle Creek, Grand Rapids, and Muskegon into one big market. The inertia at the marketplace was always labeled at the time as "market straddling."

To make a long story short, after years of promotion and active campaigning, western Michigan has collectively become one great market. It is now the 34th market in the United States and falls into the exclusive billing as being one of the "top 50." That ranking brought this community out of the unknown category and established it as one of the great economic forces in the nation.

John Fetzer's pioneering effort has brought into the area some 25 radio stations and four television stations, all of which are making their presence felt as a solid economic entity in a great marketplace. Kalamazoo, as an outstanding cultural and business center, has had the timetable of its institutional growth greatly accelerated through the establishment of this sound, economic underpinning.



Fetzer stands in front of the memorabilia cabinet in his office. The telephone in the center shelving was acquired from Hitler's office in Germany during the last stages of the campaign in World War II. He was in charge of the U. S. Office of Censorship during the war.



Billy Martin, former Detroit Tiger manager, and Fetzer



Taken in 1921

sets. His verve rubbed off on his brother-in-law.

Fetzer's absorption in radio came in the days when it was known as "the wireless" and when code signals in the "dots-and-dashes" mode were the only things transmitted. During his teen years, Fetzer worked on the first radio telephone sets developed in government laboratories at Purdue during World War I, expanding on much of the knowledge given to him by his brother-in-law.

It was Fetzer's mother, the former Della Frances Winger, who pointed him toward Purdue's electrical engineering

curriculum following his graduation from West Lafayette High School. (In 1964, Fetzer published *One Man's Family*, a history and genealogy of the Fetzer family and its Germanic roots. Eight years later, he authored a similar book about his mother's family.)

Broadcasting was in its swaddling clothes back in the early 1920s. At Purdue, Fetzer and some fellow students built their own wireless sets and then would hold their breaths to await sounds from the Naval Training Station just north of Chicago in Evanston. "It seemed like a miracle when we could

General Eisenhower and a group of broadcasters met in the Allied headquarters in Frankfurt, Germany just after the conclusion of World War II. John Fetzer is to his left. Their mission was to determine policy to help restore radio service to Germany, develop as much German programming as possible, and to keep the German people informed of the coming of the Americans as the occupational army. Prior to the invasion "Ike" had picked out this building (I. G. Farben Chemical Company) and ordered the bombers to spare it. He wanted to use it as Allied headquarters during the occupation. All the buildings around it were completely flattened



talk to them in Evanston. It was only 120 miles, but it was like Marconi transmitting across the Atlantic to us," said Fetzer. He was at Purdue when he participated in two-way radio speech experiments with Dr. Frank Conrad, who was in Pittsburgh. From these experiments, the radio broadcasting industry sprouted, and so did the Fetzer empire. The two stations involved ultimately became KDKA in Pittsburgh and WLK.

"Dr. Conrad in Pittsburgh was my contemporary," he said. "He also had a wireless telephone operation. It was just like a broadcast studio before the

days of broadcast studios. We'd talk back and forth and soon realized that people were listening to our conversations on their crystal sets. One day, Dr. Conrad bought a phonograph record and played some music. People dialed in the hits of the day on their crystal sets.

"It was also a political year," Fetzer recalled, "and Conrad did the first election-results broadcast of Warren G. Harding's race for the presidency. He had some runners bring him the latest bulletins from the daily newspaper. A local department store even gave him a so-called grant to mention its name during

the broadcast. So you can see how it all got started. Now remember, this was no radio station. It was just two operators communicating with each other over the wireless, but the idea started to catch on."

Fetzer was not on the Boilermakers' campus for long. This fledgling field of communications was going to take off soon and there were all sorts of opportunities for men like John Earl Fetzer who understood how the contraptions worked. The young experimenter continued his voluminous research into radio communications in this country and in Europe.

Fetzer engaged in design and construction work in all parts of the country as a consulting engineer in communications. It was that capacity that brought him to Berrien Springs and ultimately Kalamazoo.

"I built a broadcasting station in Indianapolis," Fetzer recalled, "and then I was called to Chicago as a consultant on the building of another station there for the Chicago Federation of Labor."

His Michigan life began in 1923 when he was retained by Andrews University in Berrien Springs to build a radio station on campus. KFGZ became the first broadcasting station in southwest Michigan. It was at Andrews where he completed his college education, earning his bachelor's degree there in 1927. That's also where he met the former Rhea Maude Yeager, an Augusta native and his wife of 54 years.

It was tough to make a buck in radio's pioneer days and there was great debate over how it should be done. That's why the young communications entrepreneur traveled to Europe in 1928 to study broadcasting systems in England, Holland, Germany, Switzerland, and France.

"Over there, radio was tied completely to government," Fetzer said, "and that's why I recommended to others in the American industry that we try to keep radio in the private enterprise sector in developing stations. •I had saved my money and paid for my own journey to Europe. I worked hard and was thrifty. You could call me frugal. I was making a little money as a consultant and by building radio stations." In other words, he was now ready to launch what would develop into an American broadcasting empire.

"Andrews ran out of money to run

its radio station," he said, "so the college sold it to me and I moved the operation to Kalamazoo. I changed the call letters to WKZO and went on the air as a 500-watt daytime radio station in 1930.

"Outside of the equipment," he said, "I had about \$156 in working capital."

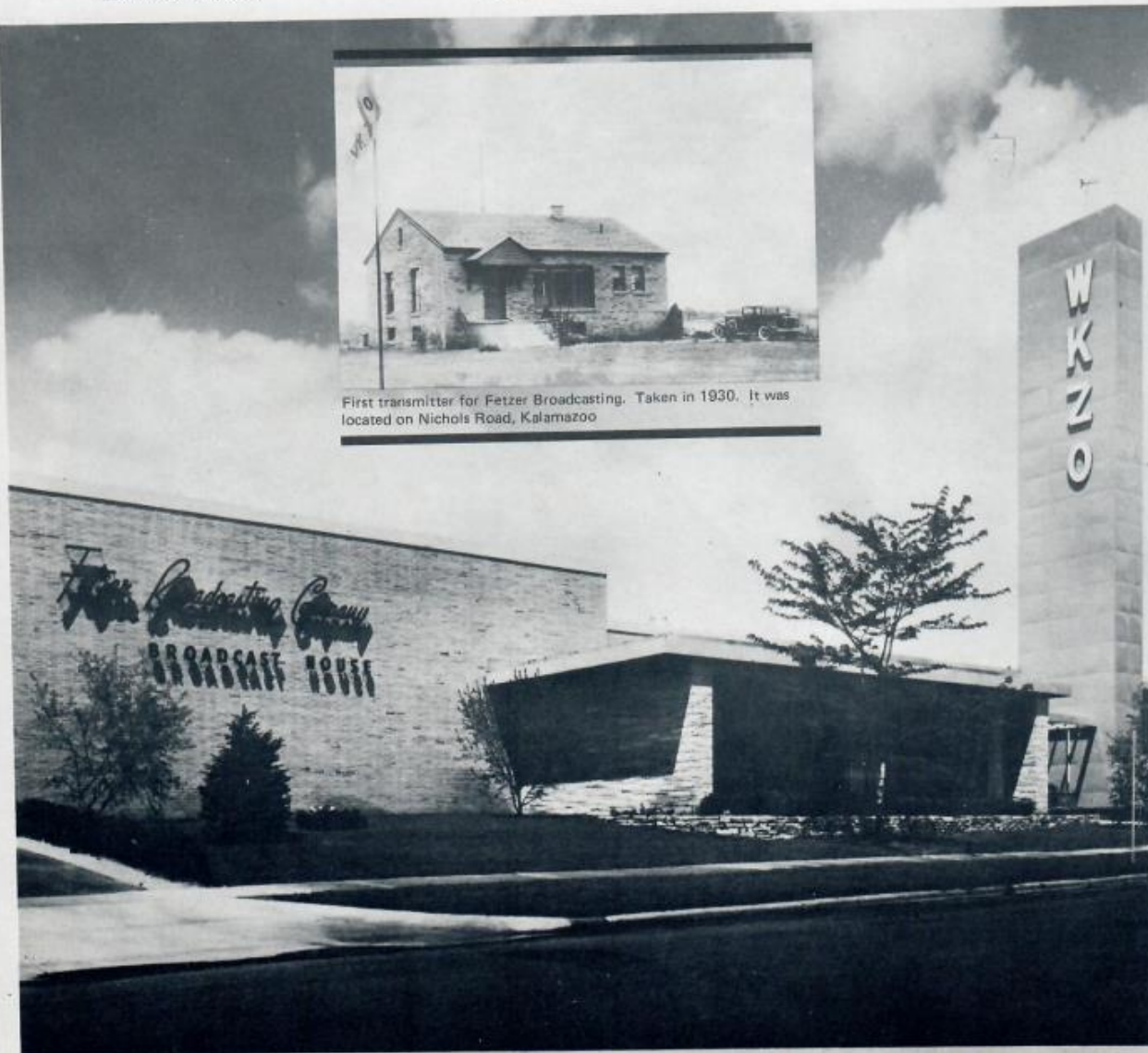
The future didn't exactly look bright because it was the beginning of what historians call "The Great Depression." At the time, Kalamazoo was the only large Michigan city without a radio station.

After President Herbert Hoover set up a licensing syndicate, "everybody who applied for a license got one," Fetzer said, "many on the same wavelength. It was just about utter chaos until the Radio Act was passed and established the Federal Radio Commission, the predecessor of the Federal Communications Commission."

continued on page 11



First transmitter for Fetzer Broadcasting. Taken in 1930. It was located on Nichols Road, Kalamazoo





A Fetzer View of the Future

John E. Fetzer has always been a man of vision, but the Kalamazoo radio pioneer admits that even some of his "pictures" have been developed prematurely—were ahead of their time.

"I got into the radio syndication business ten years too early," he said with a laugh. He assembled a consortium of radio stations to promote the package. "It didn't make it, but today the concept is an important cog in the communications industry." The "residuals" from that piece of premature business insight—shares of stock—serve as wallpaper in his "executive wash room."

As a Kalamazoo College trustee from 1954 to 1976, Fetzer was instrumental in bringing astronaut Edgar Mitchell to campus a few short years after his visit to the moon. Through that acquaintance, Fetzer became affiliated with Mitchell's Institute of Noetic Science, which is concerned with the exploration of inner space—a person's mind. Fetzer became a member of the board.

"In the last decade, there has been a change in our thinking about the world and our place in it," he explained. "It's time to think in larger terms. What kind of world is this? Where are we going? Has the United States lost its way in following the forefathers' game plan for freedom, free enterprise, and the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness? Are we losing it as a human race? Has our outlook become self-centered, plagued by selfish materialism? Do we still have a moral code or is it no holds barred?"

"We have to explore the nature of man with more depth than ever before,"

Fetzer said. "You can't legislate goodness and you can't keep appropriating billions of dollars to cure the planet's ills. We've got to find something in the human spirit that would allow a person to take care of his or her problems without outside interference. We've got to promote self-reliance instead of breeding a welfare state."

The Institute of Noetic Science promotes programs in which the human species can find out more about itself. The programs are introspective modules that promote self-reliance, independence, and do-it-yourselfism.

"Man so operates in his physical world that he almost discards the intrinsic value of the inner man," Fetzer said. "True, man is a physical being, but he is more than that. He is a spirit, the result of creative intelligence. Man must learn to use the large resources at his disposal, but he's not using them at this time."

An example of what lies ahead, Fetzer believes, is the concept of holistic, or biofeedback, medicine. It's "the power of positive thinking, a la Dr. Kildare."

The radio pioneer also talks about "another dimension of the cosmic" which will lead to the discovery of new dimensions in the use of solar energy. He foresees an unlimited quantity of solar energy for use by people all over the world "to run our cars, trains, planes. It will light, heat, and air condition our homes. Water generators will bring an unlimited supply of water and deserts will be turned into gardens." That's a refreshing alternative to what the doom-sayers have been telling the world.

"Man has to learn to tap his inner resources," Fetzer said, "in order to improve his decision-making abilities in a world growing more complex each day. Man's gray matter is a very underutilized organ."

The soon-to-be-80 broadcasting innovator also has some unusual theories about the hereafter. The end of life may be the beginning of something new. It could be the most exciting experience yet.

"I don't believe that man comes into this life to have a shallow experience, make some improvements and developments, only to fade away to nothing," he said. "There's something more. Five minutes after man discards his material body in this world, he could assume another body, another form. He could be operating on another channel, a new frequency, a new plane of existence."

"I think that every person will transfer to that new plane, but he or she will be precisely in the same place or life status as when the person was in the previous plane. The kind of life you had in the old channel will have nothing to do with the new channel. However, you may be able to take advantage of the mistakes you've made. Like waiting another ten years before trying syndication," he said with a laugh. "The next channel will bring great opportunity for all of us."

"I believe in a heaven, but a hell is a product of our society," Fetzer concluded. "Man maybe can't change the world, but he can change himself and thus can have an effect on how society progresses." †

FETZER

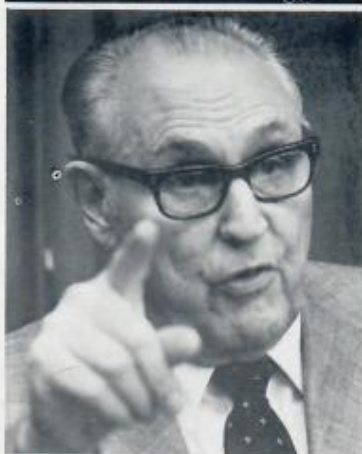
continued from page 8

WKZO's early days found it operating out of studios in the old Burdick Hotel in downtown Kalamazoo where the Kalamazoo Center now stands. The transmitting tower was on Nichols Road northwest of the downtown area.

Fetzer and Tam Craven, an engineer in Washington, collaborated on developing a new piece of radio technology called the directional antenna. Fetzer went to the FCC (then FRC) with a proposal for a full-time nightly operation, made possible by the directional antenna.

"That prompted a long series of hearings," Fetzer said, "and litigation with a radio station in Omaha which had the same frequency on the dial as we did. The Omaha station maintained that we would interfere with its signal. Called 'The 590 Case,' it went through the U.S. Supreme Court twice, but it was decided on the floor of the U.S. Senate.

"The Omaha party had a powerful Washington lobby," Fetzer said, "and I decided that I'd have to do a bit of that myself. I was 28 at the time. Well, after a long, long struggle, we won and WKZO was granted an experimental license under the directional antenna technology in 1938. The Supreme Court ordered the FCC to do it. That opened the door for some 3,000 stations to get



"The Omaha party had a powerful Washington lobby."

their broadcasting licenses. 'The 590 Case' greatly expanded the impact of radio on the country and helped business flourish, I believe."

It also was the thrust that his broadcasting game plan needed. It was like striking an oil well, finding the mother lode.

Prior to 1940, WKZO had been a "Fiddler on the Roof" station. Its broadcasting day went something like "Sunrise, Sunset." But thanks to "The 590 Case," it launched night-time programming on March 15, 1940, and offered



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Fetzer eventually became president of the Kalamazoo Chamber of Commerce in the early 1940s, but his enterprise wasn't exactly welcomed with open arms during the previous decade.

"We went on the air in the heart of the Depression," he said. "There was no such thing as ad money. I wasn't the only fellow on a shoestring. Everybody worked on credit. We traded air time for groceries and meal tickets. Jobs were scarce and we just inched along. Everybody was underpaid. Mrs. Fetzer worked as the program director and secretary and I didn't draw a salary. I built all of the equipment that we needed and served as the studio engineer at the Burdick studio. I was lucky to scrape up enough cash to meet the payroll.

"We had some tough times until the late 1930s," he continued, "and I think the average guy would have quit long before that. I guess a mixture of pride, stubbornness, and stupidity kept me at it. If I knew then what I know now about economics, I would have shut down.

"I remember one time when I was flat-out broke," Fetzer said. "I went to a local bank official, told him who I was and what I did, and asked if I could borrow \$1,000. He said, 'Young man, find

something else to do. There is no way that somebody can make an honest living from the air.' The banker even spread the word around town that nobody should make a loan to me. I'm not bitter at the way I was treated. He had every right to believe the way he did. Radio advertising was brand new. I stuck at it because I was too young to know the ways of the sophisticated world."

Fetzer had to overcome prejudice in the business community about his industry's worthiness. "In the old days, the chamber of commerce used to dictate what advertising budgets should be for local businesses and where those ads should be placed. Most of them frowned on radio ads. I'd go out, sell the ads, write them, and put them on the air. But I lost many accounts because of this prejudice."

He recalled one frustrating experience when a department store claimed that WKZO had broadcast erroneous information in an advertisement. "The ad was a plant by people opposed to advertising on radio," he said. "We had no tape recording of the broadcast and no record of what the store wanted and we couldn't prove that our message had been right. I was convinced that to stay in business, we had to break down this prejudice.



Rhea Fetzer

"We gave the old Liberty Market on N. Burdick Street unlimited air time and advertising. The owner did so much

business that he had to greatly expand his store, which developed into Kalamazoo's first supermarket. This helped con-

vince the business community in town that radio advertising was not too bad." Fetzer said that his enterprise turned



Pope Paul VI greets a group of broadcasters in 1966. They were sent abroad by the International Cultural Service to gather information on foreign news operations. Right side, center are Mr. and Mrs. Fetzer, and to their left are Mr. and Mrs. Carl Lee. Lee is president of Fetzer Broadcasting

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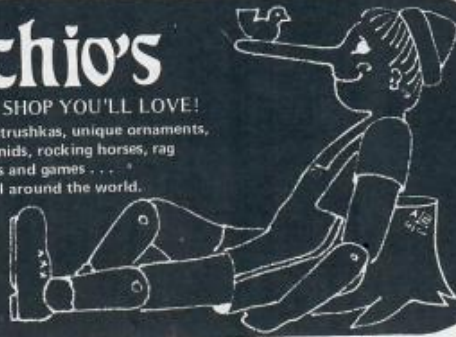
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"I warned Pearson that German U-boats could sink every one of those ships."

the corner at the start of the 1940s when he got the full-time license. After a long series of negotiations, he hammered out an affiliation with the CBS network, which attracted a lot of national advertising accounts to sweeten the pot.

With WKZO on sound footing, Fetzner moved into the Grand Rapids market and started WJEF, a 250-watter that operated out of a glassed-in studio in a downtown department store. That also proved to be a dynamite public relations ploy as people became acquainted with radio programming.

Once Fetzner became active in the radio industry on a national level, his horizon started to expand. Traveling back



"I was at the right place at the right time..."



pick up his broadcasts and would

and forth to Washington to lobby for his directional antenna, he got acquainted with leaders in the industry, with FCC officials, and with lawmakers. "I was at the right place at the right time and was able to participate in important decisions that shaped broadcasting."

Highly regarded in his profession, Fetzer was asked by Frank Stanton of CBS to record his recollections of early broadcasting for Columbia University's Oral History Project because few of broadcasting's pioneers have more imposing credentials than the Kalamazooan who started the city's first radio station a half century ago.

As a member of the National Association of Broadcasters' board for a dozen years, Fetzer was appointed the national radio censor for the U.S. Office of Censorship during World War II. He has some good and some not-so-good memories about those days as he "watch-dogged" more than 900 radio stations and their networks. In the vast majority of cases, radio news services complied with his office's wishes of a voluntary censorship system and did not broadcast information that could be beneficial to the enemy.

"I still remember a phone call I received from Drew Pearson at 6:30 one Sunday evening," he recalled. "He told me that in a half hour he was going on the air to report that the United States had sold five vintage destroyers to Russia and they were to leave Norfolk at a certain time."

"I warned Pearson that German U-

boats off our eastern coast could pick up his broadcasts and would sink every one of those ships. We had to talk like the blues and try to reach his sense of decency because he was possibly signing the death warrant for a large number of American sailors. For whatever reason, he didn't use the news item, but it was touch-and-go there awhile. He yelled, kicked, cussed, and raised a ruckus."

In an article he wrote in a September, 1945, edition of the magazine *Broadcasting*, Fetzer expanded on his four years as a federal censor. He pointed out that such vital secrets as the atomic bomb, radar, the movements of troops

and ships, intelligence plans and news were protected throughout the war years by broadcasters and radio newsmen. He wrote that the radio industry had no precedents to guide it because World War I had nothing like it.

As the national radio censor, Fetzer advocated a program of self-regulation. But he also developed a voluntary code of what could be used, what couldn't, what was confidential, and what types of news items could place allied troops in jeopardy. Each station manager had the authority and the responsibility not to air news that could damage the nation's war effort.



A FOUR-STAR REVIEW FOR KALAMAZOO HIGHER EDUCATION:

"The quality and diversity of higher education may yet be preserved. Private and public colleges are starting to pool resources . . . For instance, a consortium in Kalamazoo, Michigan, comprises a state university, a public community college, and two church-affiliated colleges. Thanks to the consortium, students can take classes at any campus on a space-available basis, for the price of their regular tuition; the schools have merged duplicative criminal justice programs into one; and the colleges share faculty and library and computer services."

"Colleges and the Demographic Pinch"
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
March 25, 1980

★ KALAMAZOO
COLLEGE

★ KALAMAZOO
VALLEY
COMMUNITY
COLLEGE

★ NAZARETH
COLLEGE

★ WESTERN
MICHIGAN
UNIVERSITY

"If we had to," Fetzer said, "we probably would have stopped Pearson some way to save those lives. We had great cooperation in those days. I'm not sure if that would be the case today. If World War III started, the United States would probably be its own worst enemy because there is a tendency in this country to tell it all, spell it all out, no matter what the consequences. I don't think that would be right because we could jeopardize our military defenses."

Fetzer is not ashamed to wear his Americanism and fiscal conservatism on his sleeve. He still is proud that his federal agency "was the only one in this



"What happened in Berlin was that the Russians took control of the city's broadcasting facilities. Ike was furious. He wanted to move in and occupy the stations."

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country's history" to request Congress to reduce its budget.

When the war started to wind down, Fetzer began to fire the 15,000 people employed in the U.S. Office of Censorship. "We just didn't need them anymore," he said. "We kept going to Congress asking for a reduction in our budget. We were probably the only bureaucracy to ever do that—voluntarily cut its expenses."

"When the fighting stopped," he continued, "we gathered all our papers, stuffed them into barrels, and stored them in the basement of the National Archives. We closed up shop."

"I'm convinced that if we hadn't, the Office of Censorship would still be with us today, and I shudder to think how powerful it would be. It would have been promulgated and become awesome in size. During wartime, a certain degree of censorship is essential, but such an office would greatly curtail the freedom of the press at any other time."

But Fetzer wasn't through with wartime activities. Just before the last shot was fired, the Kalamazooan was asked by General Dwight Eisenhower to follow the troops into Germany and begin the task of rehabilitating German broadcasting.

On Eisenhower's mission, Fetzer and 14 other radio officials traveled also to Labrador, Scotland, England, France, Luxembourg, and Italy, a 13,000-mile journey in 30 days. In addition to meeting Eisenhower, Fetzer's party also had an audience with Pope Pius XII and met General George Patton.

"That, I think, would have to be the most exciting thing that has happened to me in broadcasting," he said. "I went right in behind the 82nd Airborne. There was still some shooting in Berlin."

"What happened in Berlin was that the Russians, when they moved in, took control of the city's broadcasting facilities," Fetzer said. "Ike was furious. He wanted to move in and occupy the stations."

Why?

"The point was that with broadcast facilities like that," he continued, "the Russians could put out all sorts of prop-

agenda to solidify their hold on the eastern European nations, which became the satellite countries and were swept behind the Iron Curtain. The Soviets



World Series celebration in 1968

were telling the people of eastern Europe that the food in their bellies was coming from Russia. It was coming from the United States. Ike wanted to take some immediate corrective steps against the Russians, but he turned the issue over to the U.S. State Department which settled the matter after seven years of negotiations.

"By that time," Fetzer said, "the geography of Europe was settled and Russia was in control. If Ike had acted his way instead, the geography and politics would have been altered, which is the setting today for World War III."

Fetzer was allowed to enter and inspect the Reichschancellory in Berlin shortly after the end of the war in 1945 and a display case in his office serves as a constant reminder of those chaotic days. Among his souvenirs are the gas mask issued to Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's chief propaganda minister; a telephone used by Der Führer himself; wood from Hitler's desk; and reports detailing the Nazi investigations of people with Jewish backgrounds.

Fetzer's own communications business was growing during the war. By 1942, WKZO had become a 5,000-watt, day-and-night station. Fetzer began to add other stations, and the roster grew like this: WJEF established in Grand Rapids in 1945; WKZO-TV begun in 1950; WJFM started in Grand Rapids in 1951; the Cornhusker Television Corporation (KOLN-TV) in Lincoln, Nebraska, acquired. Fetzer himself became the chairman of the board of station WMBD in Peoria; he formed the Fetzer Music Corporation and acquired the Muzak franchise for out-state Michigan in 1958;

continued on page 36



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FETZER

continued from page 17

established Fetzer Television, Inc. in Cadillac and WWTW in 1958, and added an FM radio outlet three years later; added KGIN-TV in Grand Island, Nebraska, to the Cornhusker properties in 1961; added WWUP-TV in Sault Ste. Marie to his holdings in 1962; established Fetzer Cablevision in Kalamazoo in 1967; added station WWAM in Cadillac to his radio holdings in 1968; and acquired



"For years I wet-nursed television, getting the right people to help make policy ..."

Medallion Broadcasters, Inc. and its station KMEG-TV in Sioux City, Iowa, in 1969. (He has since sold WJEF in Grand Rapids, WWTW in Cadillac, and WWUP-TV in Sault Ste. Marie.)

With radio firmly established and through his involvement in professional broadcasting associations, Fetzer turned his attention to another new and exciting innovation in communications—television. He cranked up WKZO-TV in July of 1950. He has also held various posts in the National Association of Broadcasters and worked at making the industry all it should be.

One of the chief watchdogs of the American television industry as chairman of the TV Code Review Board of the National Association of Radio and Television Broadcasters, Fetzer called for "a voluntary program of good behavior" to forestall government regulations. In remarks delivered at a national convention in May of 1958, he said the TV industry "can't abide blatant irresponsibility. There is no reason now, and there will be none in the future, for government regulation unless we ourselves, through indifference, provide it. One way to avoid such a traffic pattern of surrender," he continued, "is through a voluntary observance of the basic tenets of good behavior contained in the television code."

"For years I wet-nursed television," Fetzer said candidly, "getting the right people to help make policy for the industry, to help the industry down the right path."

It was that path that brought him back to baseball more than a quarter of a century after Fred Ribbe taught him

Morse code and posted the results of the Tiger games on the depot wall.

Fetzer helped George Trendle put together the statewide radio network that broadcasts the Tiger games all over Michigan. The key station was WXYZ in Detroit and Harry Heilman, one of the great Tiger hitters of all time, was the announcer. Fetzer played a similar role in creating the Tigers' first TV network across the state. It was the possible loss of this prestigious broadcasting franchise that spurred him into the syndicate to buy the baseball team.

"When it became known that the Briggs family was going to sell the team," Fetzer said, "we were interested because we felt that if the wrong group bought control, we might lose our right to broadcast the games. Besides, you got to remember I was always a Tiger and a baseball fan."

"Fred Knor (another radio pioneer, now deceased) came to me and said he was interested in buying the Tigers," Fetzer said, "but he wasn't sure how to put such a thing together. We talked about it and we talked with mutual friends. Eventually, we put together our 11-member syndicate and ours was the winning bid." At the time, it was a record selling price for a baseball franchise. Fetzer said that the syndicate idea never



"We hired and fired managers at the drop of a hat..."

worked because "you can't run a ball club by committee. Someone has to be the boss."

"They were all fine businessmen, but when it came to baseball they had a tendency to make snap judgments," Fetzer recalled. "We hired and fired managers at the drop of a hat and even traded managers with Cleveland. I got tired of all the uproar and bought the remaining two-thirds of the club."

At an age when most men seek the simpler life of retirement, Fetzer remains the industrious, vital personality he has always been. In addition to owning the

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Tigers and radio and TV stations across the country, his multi-million-dollar empire has included film production companies, cable television enterprises, background music franchises, oil wells, Arizona land development, mining rights, and manufacturing concerns. He divides his time between his Kalamazoo home on Clovelly Road, his summer quarters on Otter Lake in Benzie County, and his winter ranch near Tucson, Arizona.

It would be a tough choice for him to make if he had to name his number one love—radio or baseball.

"As an institution, baseball is more emblematic of the American dream than anything else because it puts everything together," he once said.

He maintains that major league baseball is not in the big business class of General Motors and ITT, but it has all of the headaches of big business—tax laws, inflation, the unsound economic picture, labor unions, contracts, and anti-trust laws. "The owner of baseball team has to live the life of a riverboat gambler because he can either make a lot of money or lose a lot in one year. You have to learn to live with that."



"Jim Campbell and I are willing to settle for a long, no-cut contract and let the ballplayers run the team."

Fetzer is one of the most influential and most respected owners in the game. But his peers have not heeded his advice when it comes to competing for baseball free agents who are holding out for multi-million-dollar contracts. "Deferred payments are used and that affects the net health of the ball club. There is no way that an owner can get out from under those if he ever wanted to sell his team."

Would he buy the Tigers again? "Probably, because it saved our broadcasting rights to the games. But if I had to make that decision in today's climate of higher and higher prices for talent, I'd say, with tongue in cheek, that Jim Campbell and I are willing to settle for a long, no-cut contract and let the ballplayers run the team." †